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# THE BLOB AND THE BLOCK. WHEN THE RHETORIC OF THE SMOOTH AND THE STRIATED WENT ALL WRONG

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## **Abstract**

This paper conforms to a view of architecture and the distribution of urban space as bio-political parameters of dominance and resistance. Using G. Deleuze & F. Guattari's seminal essay on 1444. *The Smooth and the Striated*, I intend to show how Global Capitalism, by replicating the discourse of the smooth and the ungraspable, has voided Dialectics of its subversive potential.

## **Keywords**

Architectural parametricism, biopolitics, Deleuze & Guattari, global capitalism, public space.

## Resumen

El presente artículo contempla la arquitectura y la distribución del espacio urbano como parámetros biopolíticos de dominación y resistencia. Valiéndose del ensayo *1444. Lo liso y lo estriado*, de Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, se pretende demostrar cómo el capitalismo global, gracias a su capacidad para emular el discurso de lo fluido y lo intangible, habrá conseguido despojar a lo dialéctico de su potencial subversivo.

## Palabras clave

Parametricismo arquitectónico, biopolítica, Deleuze & Guattari, capitalismo global, espacio público.

*I am certain that this century will  
be known as Deleuzian, but I am  
not sure that that's good news!*

Laura Bazzicalupo, Erice, 2015

## Introduction

These are extracts of Zaha Hadid's speech upon receiving the Design of the Year Award for her Heydar Aliyev Centre in Baku (Azerbaijan) by the London Design Museum, 2014: "We're absolutely delighted to receive the Design of the Year Award. The surface of the HeydarAliyev Centre's external plaza rises and folds to define a sequence of public event spaces within [...] It's an architectural landscape where concepts of seamless spatial flow are made real – creating a whole new kind of civic space for the city."<sup>1</sup>

A picture is worth a thousand words. The Heydar Aliyev Centre, a performance arts venue built as Baku's new spectacle-architecture, is a smooth white structure of unquestionable and idiosyncratic beauty. It features a giant curving surface folding onto itself, almost as if the ground has soared up and gained shape by a force of inner will. At the impossible limit where fluid turns solid, the building seems to be less the product of man-made activity and more a natural phenomenon: either the folding, curling involution of the pre-existing ground, or a giant wave that has solidified in an instant of flooding over the bay promenade. Strikingly though, and in spite of the remarkable proportions of the lifting surface, the building circumvents elevation and seems to respond to the painterly gesture of depiction – of doubling the bay and drenching it in white. Once again, one may feel tempted to confront the building with questions of architectural agency. Its volume appears to be self-generated, a swollen topography that has lent itself to the intriguing inconsistencies of the two-dimensional. As two membranes that have been conflated, building and bay defy the mass of a vertical standing edifice and result in a volume that can only be sensed and anticipated, and that as such, can only be conceived as *virtual*.

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1. See D. Howarth, "Zaha Hadid's Heydar Aliyev Center wins Design of the Year 2014" in: *Dezeen*, 30<sup>th</sup> June 2014. <https://www.dezeen.com/2014/06/30/zaha-hadid-heydar-aliyev-center-wins-design-of-the-year-2014/> (Last retrieved, December 2016).

Left in less capable hands, a project that is meant to honour Heydar Aliyev, Azerbaijan's late statesman – or for some, a dictator –, could have turned into an *explicit* display of iconicity. Take, for example, the Lenin Palace in Baku (Alish Lemberanskiy, 1976), today's Heydar Aliyev Palace at the Heydar Aliyev Park Square. This building bears a design logic that is parallel to a series of theatres built around the mid 1970s – each of which functioned as a backdrop for propagandistic programming aimed at renewing Soviet fervour through the promotion of popular song contests. Originally, a statue of Lenin stood at the opposite end of the square in front of this building, upright with his arm stretched out above the square as though vehemently leading the masses. After its post-Perestroika remodelling as the Heydar Aliyev Palace, the statue of Lenin was replaced by an almost identical one resembling Aliyev, with his arm stretched out *to* the masses. Facing the building, it now looks as if he is welcoming them for a symbolic embrace, thus turning the open space of the square into a visual enclosure. The space brings to mind the All Union Festival of Soviet Song contest, which from the 60s on was a cohesive means among the satellite republics, precisely following the Prague repression when military parades fell out of favour. The Summer Theatre in Chkalov Park in Dnipropetrovsk (Ukraine) is, in its typology, another related example, with its curved timber-like pillars on the façade of an otherwise unexciting block-like construction. Yet, along with the cunning of perception and iconicity, one has to read this peculiar typology as a façade that bears two modes of symbolism, a squaring of the circle, as it were. The first, with its explicitly curved structures, pays tribute to the curvature of the yurt, a tent used by nomadic people of the Russian steppe. The second, which, while more implicit in nature, reads more readily, is the frontal block-like neoclassical façade preferred by state architecture in Moscow. Architecture is always *parlante*. Arguably, what this typology suggests, aside from local specificities, is a message of loyalty to Moscow on behalf of the South Republics; of the nomad willing to surrender to the state.

An important passage from the three-dimensional to the two dimensional can, however, be noticed in Hadid's architectonic proposal for the Alyev Centre, as the old *block* typology, with its overtly standing qualities, evolves into a soft, pliant shape that seems to consist of pure exteriority and to oppose no resistance. This process cannot simply be reduced either to the tectonics of the building, with the *block* becoming *fold* through the mere rounding of edges, or to its symbolic effacements, in the sense of the architecture attempting to render an ideology. Rather, this is a process of shifting from the idea that a building bears representational information – that is, as effectively *standing* and *standing for* – to its ability to produce *affective* warrants of an aesthetic realization.

Hadid's project is the instance of a space as something that can be sensed, experienced, appealed and avowed but not conceptualized, represented or spelled out.<sup>2</sup> No literalist message, as with Soviet-era State classicism, is present in Baku's new State sponsored architecture. The façade recedes and the flowing fabric arises. That is to say, architecture's frontality, its *face* and explicit reference to content and agency, has given way to cloth-like structures, where the old equivalence of the façade as the consistent expression of inner content liquefies into a self-morphing *je ne sais quoi*. The visual bridge to the place where questions concerning representation and agency may arise has been severed and substituted by a deliberately non-referential architectural *event*. This begs several questions: "Who are the sponsors? What agenda is it aligning? Is it a private or a public enterprise? Where does the financing capital come from? To whom does it speak?"

As we move into the complexity of space as an immanent set of social relations defined by use and constraint, architecture and urban space reveal an abstract material practice of distribution, administration, entitlement and designation. Even when the perception we have of these processes is that they operate on a non-ideological level, that is, as self-contingent practices of autopoiesis and networking, the motivations presiding those programmes of designation and distribution can be as ideologically informed as the eeriest of the Soviet parades.

But, who says the so-called smart city, with its impressive curved and blob architecture and allegedly self-regulating technologies is not equally reliant on ideology? Coined sometime in 2005, the term smart city describes urban centres with perfectly attuned networks of logistics, informational systems and actors cooperating for common welfare where nothing is wasted. Are our smart cities, with their insistence on smooth and effortless flowing supplies, evermore dematerialized and hastened informational exchanges, and elimination of production discomforts, not all about replicating Le Corbusier's *living machine*, which has been dismissed as delusional and dreamlike? How different is the smart city's promise to operate as a trans-ideological self-organizing and self-sufficient organism from the programmatic living of Le Corbusier's state machines, the *Unités d'Habitation*?

Le Corbusier described the *Unité* in similar autopoietic terms, modelling it after a cruise ship that placidly steers itself through the ocean like a self-sufficient unit.<sup>3</sup> It was to be the perfect example of a living machine, which conveniently made invisible the

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2. It is difficult not to evoke here F. Jameson's remarks on architecture and the kind of two-dimensionality, or lack of depth, that he sees as the determining feature of Post-Modern culture – as he elaborates in his groundbreaking *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Duke University Press, North Carolina, 1991.

3. See Le Corbusier, "Mass-Production Housing", in *Toward an Architecture*, Getty Research Institute, London, 2007, p. 253.

army of day labourers attuning themselves to the needs of blissful and carefree passengers. Day labourers and purveyors are in Le Corbusier's texts reduced to small invisible hands emerging from narrow openings in the cabin closets to provide fresh food and ironed laundry. Where and how these labourers live is unknown, hidden from everyday view. Le Corbusier's *Urbanisme* never recognizes or explains the infrastructural and subterranean forces. But, how much should we reproach him for making the substantial and life-giving energies of labour invisible? Cities like Johannesburg, daily shuttling cheap black-African labour from neighbouring townships in and out of the city, functions this way, making labour only temporarily and barely visible. In the twenty-first century, a new mode of *invisible apartheid* rooted in uneven development and real estate has developed around most major metropolises, with surrounding dormitory cities and cycling day commuters accommodating rising housing costs. Space, urban space, and the built landscape stand as a major paradigm of domination, control and the exertion of power. So, is the smartness of our cities not so much the product of a self-organizing system of dematerialization, deterritorialization and flow, as it is of control and of careful orchestrated agendas?

If one were to make an architectonic genealogy of power's pursuit of invisibility, namely, through an elegantly modulated reluctance to exposure, Hadid's building seems uncannily linked to all of the blocks above, even while identified as innovative in its non-referentiality. And all those buildings, as much as they have been dismissed for epitomizing the Soviet State's bland and outmoded taste for chunky block structures, appear to be pregnant with an inner force that wrestles to emerge as a *blob*. But, if that holds true, how did the block become a blob and then morph into fold? That is, how did a set of static relations and agencies modulating people's interaction with public life become a self-regulating system of unfixed relations, and then mutate into a borderless smooth structure, a deregulated and ever expanding plane? How did architecture shift from a paradigm of production and representation to one of consumption and flows, and ultimately to an event of real-time cybernetic interconnections? How did the spatiality of power become deregulated, faceless and unresponsive? Most importantly, what are the consequences? What has come of domination and resistance in the shift from block to blob to fold?

My thesis here is that resorting to the non-conceptual, the performative and the autopoietic as generative principles for this modality of city constructions accounts for a double benefit towards the obliteration of disturbing antagonisms from the arena of our societal exchange. On the one hand, it bypasses the very idea of both built space

and space distribution as being causally generated and thus blurs its agenda. As I will attempt to demonstrate, this is why Gilles Deleuze's stance on issues such as *causality*, *becoming* and *representation* has gained support from the pundits of this so-called *architectural Deleuzianism*<sup>4</sup> – and among them, incidentally, is Hadid's own office, under the hand of Patrik Schumacher, who happens to have pursued his activity under the rubric *Autopoiesis in Architecture*. On the other hand, also following a further architectural allegiance to Deleuze's philosophy of sensation, there is the issue of space being unutterable, i.e. something that can be sensed but that evades verbalization. The wager here is that architecture overcomes its ideological dimension as it goes beyond the dialectics of representation and iconicity; an ideology that cannot be pinned down is also one that cannot be contested. I call this the aesthetic fruition of space; where the experience of space is located in the threshold of the phenomenal and the pre-predicateness of a subliminal experience; invoking a process by which sensory experience resists the reification brought about by the utterance.

It is by being relocated in the realm of the *beautiful* and the *sensual* that architecture turns innocuous – and complacent. In fact, more and more architecture is developing into an ever so carefully monitored dispositive, engineered to generate joyous and non-conflicting experiences of desire and consumption, where friction and the power struggle are not only erased but also made anathema – the material of much-to-be-overcome old fashion Modernism. Note, for instance, how one of the members of the jury, Piers Gough, with Marilyn in her white willowing skirt in mind, likens the Heydar Aliyev Centre to an acquiescent beautiful woman – a building that is beautiful and compels admiration for its *curves*, for not being argumentative or dialectical: “Its swooning fluid on the outside and inside belying its size and complexity. The thousand and one geometrical junctions are consummately mastered and segue seamlessly into each other. [...] It is as pure and sexy as Marilyn's blown skirt. Without an ounce of awkward argumentative modernism in its bones.”<sup>5</sup>

Accordingly, for Hadid and others this is good news: the dream of a smooth, deregulated, dispossessed space, freed of antagonisms and ideologies, a global space of free-flowing people, capital and *wows!* But not so much so for the evicted inhabitants

4. As in the P. Schumacher. *The Autopoiesis of Architecture: A New Framework for Architecture*, Wiley, West Sussex, 2011. See also: D. Spencer's “Architectural Deleuzianism: Neoliberal Space, Control and the ‘Univer-city’”, in *Radical Philosophy*, 168, 9, 2011 – digital version; M. Carpo (ed.), *The Digital Turn in Architecture 1992-2012*, Wiley, West Sussex, 2012; N. Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect*, Routledge, New York & London, 2007.

5. This was P. Gough from CZWG Architects LLP

Go to <http://www.e-architect.co.uk/azerbaijan/heydar-aliyev-centre-baku> (Last retrieved on December 2016)



of the area where the Heydar Aliyev Centre stands today; the ineluctable nomads of a Century that has become Deleuzian in an uncanny way.<sup>6</sup>

So, what went wrong? Why this new taste for non-representational, non-ideological and non-frictional architecture? What is there in Modernism, in its visual rhetoric of the block to be disavowed and cast out from our urban spaces? Why this insistence on the non-argumentativeness of space, and, since Gough mentioned it, where does this imperative to suppress dialectics come from?

The link between specific space tectonics and aesthetic disposition to the bio-political dimension shall be subjected to careful analysis, precisely as a clue to understand how making the *sensual* prevail over the semiotic in the experience of space may revert into exerting more effective control over the set of social relations which that very space articulates. I claim that power effectiveness in the domination of bodies and relations derives from its inconspicuousness, i.e. from the idea that it becomes more ubiquitous and incontestable the more unutterable it is. In the following pages, I will attempt to draw a genealogy, both tectonically and theoretically speaking, of how smooth and blob typologies for space distribution (with their non-representational, non-dialectical underpinnings) have come to develop as paradigmatic elements of a certain regime of domination and control, the success of which is based, on the one hand, on deregulation and ubiquity, and on the other, on an idiosyncratic interplay of openness and impenetrability, of restriction and expansion and of entitlement and dispossession. In fact, if one pays attention to the leading trends that have been at play in the recent history of urban development, the hypothesis that the two modalities of block and blob actually do cooperate with each other becomes more apparent: the way in which an economic paradigm based on capitalized affects is nurturing and is being nurtured by societies structured around state normativism and control and where class antagonisms dissolve into the micro-politics of desire.

Now, far from seeking to uncover which aspects of Deleuze's philosophy have been perverted by neoliberal Capitalism in its material declinations, my goal is to argue how the smooth, by encouraging an economy of acted out affects (or libidinal economy), may have finally managed to remove resistance from its subversive core.

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6. The Human Right activist G. Gogia has lead a campaign to denounce the many evictions that took place in the heyday of Aliyev's this and many other building and *renewal* measurements for the city of Baku. See: <https://www.hrw.org/about/people/giorgi-gogia> (Last retrieved on December 2016).

## From block to blob: *La ville dérivée*

It was already there, the blob. Incubating, secretly inhabiting the block. It was in the *Beaubourg Effect* in 1977; a skeletal conveyor of non-persistence, a de-spatializing space, a *vacuum-making machine*, a *matrix of absolute security*.<sup>7</sup> And also in 1997, with the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao by Frank Owen Gehry; a building born with the sole purpose of moving fascinated masses around – and deemed unsuited to lodge flat canvasses or to promote restful contemplation, simply because: “When a building is as good as that one, fuck the art”<sup>8</sup> This is how architect Philip Johnson was once said to have praised a building, the core aim of which was none other than the very act of strolling, coagulated in a gallery hall and reduplicated by *The Matter of Time* (1994 – 2005), Richard Serra’s gigantic meandering steel piece. And even earlier, in 1959, lurking in the block from within, the blob was there too: in the strolling ramps at Frank Lloyd Wright’s Solomon Guggenheim Museum in New York, in the nautilus – that perfect architectural metaphor for the spiralling curve of Capital, always soaring, always in motion and where art, the masterpiece, was just a side course for obedient visitors ambling around incuriously. “Well, cut [ the paintings ] in half”, was Wright’s outrageous reaction to the reproach of how to place the canvasses on the round walls.<sup>9</sup> That said, this building truly marks a turning point: Frank Lloyd Wright’s accomplishment did not come from the architectural efforts of *effectively* giving the Guggenheim collection a housing – specially, judging from the above-mentioned suggestion to make the paintings a function of the building and not the other way around. What the building truly succeeded in was transforming the view of architecture from being a purposeful device (i.e. the product of an object-focused act of production) into a place for consuming object-detached sensations (where the object is unimportant); a place created for *the very act of strolling* along a promenade of exhibited high culture and wealth. So, there it was, breaking right onto the Manhattan warp, a taste for round structures beaconing a spot for leisure, loaded with an emancipatory sense of freedom.

It is indeed this promise for freedom and emotion incorporated into architectural morphogenesis that I claim to be a major feature in the practice of architecture since World War II and also well into the 90s. But, in claiming the blob to be a feature

7. See J. Baudrillard, “The Beaubourg-Effect: Implosion and Deterrence”, in *October*, 20, 1982, pp. 3-13.

8. See I. Estéban, *El efecto Guggenheim. Del espacio basura al ornamento*, Editorial Anagrama, Barcelona, 2007.

9. For an account of Lloyd Wright’s comments on the Guggenheim Museum see: A. Saarinen, “Tour with Mr. Wright. The noted architect, offering a preview of his new museum, talks many things – art, architecture, nature and design”, in *The New York Times*, 22 September 1957, pp. 22 – 23 and 69 – 70.

of the post-war era, I wilfully challenge common formalistic approaches that place the so-called blob architecture in stylistic coherence with the aesthetic, technological possibilities and *Zeitgeist* of the 90s, which by the same token consider Brutalism and social housing (i.e. state led projects) to be the post-war era's most determining features – that of an awkward argumentative modernism.<sup>10</sup> The view most exponents of architectural theory have of the *block* is actually that it belongs to an era when social relations are organized around stark ideologically driven state monitoring and regulation. Needless to say, the block represents the perfect symbol of a failed state, standing in the way of an unstoppable Capitalism in its demand for deregulation and with better promises for welfare. Hence the emancipatory freeing character associated with the blob, its coherence with a so-to-speak 'fukuyamaist' forecast of a trans-ideological self-regulating system of fluidity. See, for instance, how the theoretician of Postmodernism Charles Jencks subscribes to this view of associating Modernism with the *block* by using images of the demolition of the failed Pruitt-Igoe Brutalist housing project in Saint Louis to illustrate his seminal essay *The Death of Modern Architecture*.<sup>11</sup> Incidentally, the demolition of Pruitt Igoe, a monument to the myth of the state as a social engineer, was later featured in Godfrey Reggio's PoMo film *Koyaanisqatsi*, 1982. More to my point, Minoru Yamasaki, the architect who designed the Pruitt-Igoe complex, was precisely the same mind behind the ill-fated World Trade Centre in New York (opened in 1973), today rebuilt as the *One World Trade Centre* or Freedom Tower (Childs and Libeskind, 2015). I would go as far as to state that, the cooperation between desire and state normativism in the exertion of control over bodies and supplies has been the major spatial achievement of a society in its awakening to mercantilism.

So, if *blob* and *block* in fact cooperate, the question is: how?

My point is, if the thesis that *Capital* and State stand in a downright occlusive-encroaching cooperation with one another holds true (and not in a relationship of overcoming, as the afore-mentioned ranges of cultural theory and their aligned architects have sustained all along), what are the material spatial renderings that make effective and perpetuate that alliance? And, what does a material theory of space, one that deals with the design of our living spaces, have to add to the many attempts made by political science, philosophy of history and so on to address this question? For I believe it is from these renderings and from their privileged position to direct, hamper, permit, disown or

10. As G. Lynn e.g. sustains. See his *Folds, Bodies & Blobs: Collected Essays*, La Lettre volée, Bruxelles, 1998.

11. In *The Language of Postmodern Architecture*, Rizzoli, New York, 1977.

stimulate human behaviour that true bio-political power emerges. And it is from there too that an effective stance on resistance and retrieval of political agency should begin.

An elucidating place to start unravelling this conundrum *spatially* emerges with International Situationism reacting to the mandates of Functionalism of organizing social life around rational principles of productivity and standardization. What makes the Situationist proposal so interesting here is the way they seemed to grasp the fact that with Functionalism, not only a certain *aesthetic* theory of productivity was at stake, encumbering self-restraint, work and progress; more than that, it was Functionalism's *life as a technology*, i.e. a predicament of organizing social life around the spatial deployment of a function-derived normativism that the Situationists ferociously reacted to. The ground-breaking stance of this whole critique rests on the realization that (in order to abide) that particular *technology of life* had to mutate, and was already mutating, into an *ideology* – to the extent that declaring Functionalism an *ideology* and not a *technology* implied revisiting the hierarchic position objectivity and matter-of-factness it always had over subjectivity, irrationalism and unpredictability.<sup>12</sup> Functionalism was not simply a *technology*, it was an ideology; it was a *spatial* theory of society in its own right, demanding an ideological apparatus in order to pace forward. But, how was *space* seen by the Functionalist, or indeed, what kind of social-spatial typology were the Situationists reacting to? What kind of space would result from that *détournement*?

As early as 1896, the American architect Louis H. Sullivan lays bare his particular *venustas-firmitas-utilitas* of society: the *new* office building, a unified endeavour of discipline and rigour, cinching the ever-growing population of motley folks and diverging interests.<sup>13</sup> The deadlock here with Sullivan (and for Functionalism all along) was how difficult it was to discern whether rational restraint was actually the specific architectonic feature of the tall office building that would stimulate productivity and propel emancipation, or the other way around. That seamless reciprocity in the causality-effect interface of spatial structures and social order, together with the sense the building transmits of operating like a self-organized technological (and not ideological) unit is what makes the Functionalist stance so compelling here, and I believe this had also triggered the Situationist reaction.

Now, the *building* here is not simply a metaphor: society *is* at its most productive as a *building*, as a storied allocation, as a spatial designation. Therefore, under this particular

12. This is J. P. Sartre's stance on Subjectivity exposed at a conference in 1961 in Rome, later printed as "Marxism and Subjectivity. The Rome Lecture 1961", *The New Left Review*, 88, 2014, pp. 89-111.

13. His ideas published as "The tall office building artistically considered", in *Lippincott's Magazine*, March, 1896.

predicament, society is translated as something contained and harnessed by *space*, but this is a space that can only develop as an *inside*, as a self-contained universe which, by bending over inwardly, successfully creates the reliant statics of the *to each its own* philosophy. It is here, unsurprisingly, that the axiom *form follows function* makes its appearance for the first time: like a kind of endless loop, space (as form, forms of social life and so on) and functions always revert back to one another. And that axiom perfectly applies to the logic of social organization and productivity: *functions* are the pre-codified arrangements or collocations for social bodies. And if space can be called *a form*, a form of social organization, then space and social distribution are the product and the *a posteriori* result of *a function*. Consequently, for Functionalism, it was only within the pre-given confines of functions that forms, the *expression of forms* proper, could strive to exist. Situationism reacted then according to a kind of *expression-and-effect-proceed-cause* philosophy: where Functionalists saw expression following functions, the Situationists wanted functions following expression.

That is why, in texts such as *Critique of Everyday Life* by Henri Lefebvre, the Situationist examination arose from considering Functionalism to be a mutation of a vaster horizon of rational regulations restricting the subconscious and hijacking subjectivity:<sup>14</sup> the problems of modern life (discontent, boredom, obsolescence...) were the result of a productivity grid, behaving as pre-codified allocations, anticipating and suppressing individual imagination. I even claim the term *boredom* to stand as a reinterpretation of the Marxian *alienation*. Now the crux is: if it was just sterile self-restricting and self-confining *forms* of life alone that had emerged from *functions* ploughing over social magma, the reverse was not true; while the implementation of rational principles of labour organization and productivity had resulted in life being fossilized, emancipation still had to be comprehended within the realm of production. True *productive* creativity and human fulfilment would only emerge if irrational forces were allowed to take charge of productivity and evolve into life environs. So, it was not productivity in its equation with emancipation in itself that was troublesome, but the means to mobilize it. And to put it boldly, if the principle of sufficient reason in the *cause and effect* chain of productivity – and not productivity itself – was the problem there, it was affection and *jouissance*, as the ultimate *product* of productivity, that had to be produced in its place.

Thus that, the emancipating task of counteracting fossilization had to be undertaken as an restructuring intervention on space: by disassembling the previous urban grid of

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14. H. Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, Verso, London & New York, 1991.

designations of work and productivity, and by later re-assembling it around *situations* or affect-paired locations. The new Babylon would emerge as the spatial deployment of a drift (hence the term *dérivée*), as a flow where playing, toiling and sensing would merge in a gigantic slide conveying joyful people. Turning the axiom of form following function upside down, it would now be forms of expression that would have a creative and distributive agency over space.

Two consequences can be drawn from this reversal of force-form relations in the productive process, for what we are witnessing here is an unprecedented ontological reassessment of the *cause and effect* between space and social organization.

Firstly, one is my anticipated de-spatialization of space and its transformation to become smooth. By causally prioritizing social dynamics as forces over space, as their material actualization, space ceases to be a pre-existing and fully codified architectural entity, and it becomes a product of eventualities; one whose reification is tied to the serendipity of thrives and moods. More as a product rather than as a source, space is then rendered as non-causal, it is drained of the material substance where ideology crystallizes, unfolds and becomes visible. The whole Marxist question of a work-alienated society finds redemption not on the critical assessment of social-dialectical antagonisms materialized and evinced in space; but rather, emancipation, if anything, would come about through the dematerialization, dare I say deterritorialization, of space (and of production) and focusing on the creation of pleasurable situations. This is something the cry of “*Qu’ils mangent de la brioche!*” perfectly casts down.<sup>15</sup>

Secondly, by letting emotions and drives constantly modulate and prevail over spatial codified statics, space is deprived of its capacity to be uttered, read and conceptualized. Instead of parting from a semiotically pre-codified space determining over un-codified social magma, space here *is* a magma that can only be made sense of through sensing, feeling and avowing: as an aesthetic experience. *This new architecture*, Debord states, *must advance by taking emotionally moving situations, rather than emotionally moving forms, as the material it works with.*<sup>16</sup> With *psycho-geography*, a new regime of spatial sublime is making its entrance: a fluid, boundless stream, inactivating the critical potential of materialist dialectic.

But has this dream not already come true?

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15. Lefebvre even predicts the end of work all together; its complete mechanization, leaving people free to do other things. See “Lefebvre on the Situationists: An Interview”, by K. Ross (1983), in *October*, 79, 1997, pp. 69-83.

16. Find a version of G. Debord’s manifesto in the K. Stiles and P. Selz (eds.). *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists’ Writings*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996, pp. 827-828.

City centres have seen their square agorae pitted out, torn away from their old architectural quotes to history and industrial past. Think of the Ría del Nervión area in Bilbao, the industrial Düsseldorf prior to the decline of coal extraction in 1983, Baku... Large curved and cloth-like architectures, pure joy to the senses, stand now where the chunky blandness of the *ora et labora* used to rely on State achievements. Arguably, the city of Brasilia (1956, officially founded in 1960. Le Corbusier, Niemeyer, Costa) was a rehearsal of this kind of aesthetic determination for space: the magnificent curved buildings were reserved for mystified religious and civil powers; the apartment blocks, barely touching the ground, were there to accommodate the masses. Today, curved cloth and fold architecture continues to be favoured for the same purposes: financial centres, shopping malls and performance art centres are taking over that role.<sup>17</sup> These are in turn the venues where Global Capitalism's central axiom of private property deploys in the performativities of acquiring, and where the old segregation of sacred and profane is reinterpreted as in owner or disowned. And it is all there, the promise of *wellness* replacing *welfare*: there is no effort, no resistance, no indigence in sight, just wealth, fun and desire.

Upon a careful look, however, the smooth (autopoietic, non-symmetrical and strikingly both open and membrane-like) emerges not as a milieu for social emancipation. Rather, it rises as an archetypical structure that, by skilfully evolving transversal to the dimensions of open-close and inside-outside that may be ascribable to the dialectic, perfectly mirrors corporate capitalism in its aspirations for the de-regulated, the enclosed, the private and the expansive. It is as though the same space that was meant to act as a milieu for social liberation had, in the fallowness of its non-dialectical constitution, set the best conditions for the globalization of capitalism to expand. As though, in its repulsion to fault lines and depth, in its conceit to solely obey the autopoietic and immanent principles of a *parametric* technologicism, it had opened itself up to be replicated as the handmaiden of a global free market.

It is with this dilemma in mind that I propose a revision of Deleuze & Guattari's stance on immanent spatial formations overcoming State power and ideology-driven hierarchies, in their text *The Smooth and the Striated*: namely, how to allow for specific agendas behind space distribution to be tracked and contested in the absence of a causal and an *inside-outside* comprehension of space? How to re-encode and critically re-appropriate a space that had opted to make itself accessible only through affective frui-

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17. See M. R. Marella. "Lo spazio urbano come bene comune", in *Scienze del territorio*, 3, 2015, pp. 78-87.

tion? What kind of resistance can possibly accommodate a thought that exists beyond dialectics, i.e. from a plane of immanence and self-evolving morphologies?

Even when I acknowledge that there is not just one single thread within *The Smooth and the Striated* discursive texture, I must agree with some of the published critique arguing that *A Thousand Plateaus* (the volume where it comes from) was written as an attempt to offer clues in this deadlock: that of state regulation (striated) cooperating with the de-regulating logic of neoliberal economies (smooth). It is Keynesianism's longstanding pretension that Capitalism generally goes on in the absence of, indeed *opposite* to, State regulation – aside from the regulative workings of ideology and the law, which *A Thousand Plateaus* is set to overthrow. Deleuze & Guattari's originality there resides in the fact that, for them, to keep consistency with a paradigm of the immanence and non-representational models of thought, *Ideologiekritik* has to be done from a position that bypasses Marxism and the dynamics of binary oppositions contained in dialectical progressions. In the language of Deleuze & Guattari, this means two things: firstly, a reluctance to rely on the incomplexties of a lineal cause-effect relation between one system and its opposition, an unwillingness to envision overcoming Capitalism by simply opposing it with Marxism.<sup>18</sup> A second aspect derives from here: a wish to contest a view on Capitalist expansion based on the repelling de-structuring potential that the *smooth* has towards the *striated*. Notice how a complete circumvention of dialectics is at the heart of these two premises. Thus, instead of condoning that the smooth evolves and progresses *from* the striated, what Deleuze & Guattari will uphold, by serving enough instances, is the smooth progressing *because* of the workings of a striated structure, inhabiting and nurturing it from within; with no one-way causal relation between them, smooth and striated are bound in an ever self-morphing intertwinement.

Chapters 9 and chapter 12 of *A Thousand Plateaus*, for instance, deal with this matter presenting smooth-striated tropes in non-binary and carefully forged encroaching-obtruding mixes or *strata* (*the two heads of political sovereignty, or domination*): *the magician-king and the jurist-priest, the Rex and flamen, the raj and Brahman, the despot and the legislator*<sup>19</sup>

In chapter 12 on Nomadology, Deleuze & Guattari say:

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18. As in F. Jameson, "Marxism and Dualism in Deleuze", in *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 96, 3, 1997, pp. 393-416.

19. As in G. Deleuze & F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1987 (Project Lamar), pp. 351-353.



Undoubtedly, these two poles stand in opposition term by term [...]. But their opposition is only relative; they function as a pair, in alternation, as though they expressed a division of the One or constituted in themselves a sovereign unity. “At once antithetical and complementary, necessary to one another and consequently without hostility [...] They are the principal elements of a State apparatus that proceeds by a One-Two, distributes binary distinctions, and forms a milieu of interiority.”<sup>20</sup>

Once we arrive at the essay of *The Smooth and the Striated*, however, this particular torsion of terms begins to turn flaky, steering towards a different course. Convincingly expressed in the former examples, the task of articulating non-dialectical combinations of cooperating opposing poles rises as a growing challenge for Deleuze & Guattari, if not their weakest point, precisely when assessing a draft of what our living and social spaces would look alike.

Here is how the text begins:

The smooth and the striated space – nomad space and sedentary space – the space in which the war machine develops and the space instituted by the State apparatus – are not of the same nature. No sooner do we note a simpler opposition between the two kinds of space than we must indicate a much more complex difference by virtue of which the successive terms of the opposition fail to coincide entirely. And no sooner have we done that than we must remind ourselves that the two spaces only exist in mixture.

This is Deleuze & Guattari’s declaration of intention: looking for a *simpler opposition between the two kinds of space* misses the point. We are faced with a *much more complex difference* where *successive terms of the opposition fail to coincide entirely*. To put it succinctly, what they mean is: the smooth and the striated cannot overlap completely. As their successive relations and oppositions never behave symmetrically, they necessarily interact with each other *from within* and consequently, I claim, any possible inside/outside dimensionality collapses. In line with that forecast, what follows in the chapter is a deployment of various framings (scientific, political and aesthetic), where *within* relations of the smooth and the striated are manifested accomplishedly in what Flora

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20. Ibid., pp. 351-352.

Lysen and Patricia Pisters call models of a *political anthropology*.<sup>21</sup> These are, in sum, non-symmetrical but interfering forces resulting in blended-in formations that never quite narrow down as representations, nor do they as conceptual specificities.

Let us consider why, when talking the reader through different textile *technologies*, they think of patchwork as typifying that formula. They explain that in patchwork the two elements, smooth and striated, are present. Neither prevails over the other. There are no determining outlets. So it is that, although geometrically structured, the patchwork is reluctant to surrender to the dialectics of representation that one would expect to come along with the striated. In fact, with patchwork, it is striation (the grid of cloth fragments) that brings about smoothness (a discrete continuum with no episodic representations). Unlike embroidery, where the motives in the fabric obey a previous plan and a more or less iconic template, the fragments in patchwork do not aim to produce a centred image.<sup>22</sup> Later, for the musical model, they argue that the composing techniques of Pierre Boulez are the epitome of *bringing the two kinds of space to communication*, where the smooth warrants the kind of segmentation that is needed in the production of rhythm.<sup>23</sup> So here, smoothness (continuous variation) brings about striation (the sequential segmentation implicit in rhythm).

Now, something rather different appears in the section where actual dwelling space is the matter. In fact, the initial declaration of spaces existing only in mixtures begins to dissolve and, as the text progresses and in spite of Deleuze & Guattari's initial indication, *smooth* and *striated* begin to detangle *in space*. Here is how.

The smooth, they explain, is the desert. It is the ocean with its boundlessness and uncoded nature. But the smooth is not only a space, it is also a *place*, a dwelling; it is the space the nomad inhabits. And so it is that the figure of the nomad, the human, also begins to consolidate. The same goes for the striated, describing the going about of settled folks, determined by rationalizing resources and ownership, organizing the social body.<sup>24</sup> The boundlessness of the smooth finds itself in the artefacts the nomad serves herself from (in felt, for instance, a fabric-like material that is crafted in intensities, i.e. by means of the accumulative activity of matting together fibres, and with no intervention of striating looming). To be sure, felt is what stands between the human

21. F. Lysen, P. Pisters, "Introduction: The smooth and the striated", in *Deleuze Studies*, 6, 2012, pp. 1-5.

22. G. Deleuze & F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 476.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 478.

24. Deleuze had already referred to this process of a drifting, of an asymmetrical meandering of the concrete into the absolute and vice versa as "Asymmetrical Synthesis of the Sensible". See his *Difference & Repetition*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1994, p. 222.

and the space she inhabits, it acts as a membrane-like separation between the human and the absoluteness of the desert: It is what insulates, scises and alienates. It is the gap, the breach. Put this way, felt and all other artefacts by extension are bound in a material culture, of which one could presume an intermediary character between the human and the space that comes close to the definition of civilization under the most Hegelian of premises as a *world of self-alienated spirit*.<sup>25</sup> So here we are presented with a scenario where we have the smooth as a placement and the figure of the human against it. I think this is worth noting because by introducing the nomad, i.e. the subject, not only *subjectivity* enters the scene. It is also an ineluctable condition of negation (dare I say *dialectical relation*) they will have to deal with, either suppressing it or bringing it to its textual implosion.

This is an important shift from the initial de-centring style they successfully deployed hitherto, e.g. for patchwork. Upon introducing the human, at the moment when space turns into an actual habitat, the initial incommensurability of undifferentiated surfaces turns into a centred characterization of the *discourse and figure* type.<sup>26</sup> The nomad is typified, but so too is the desert. No matter how much they insist on the absence of symmetries, the two milieus now stand in perfect opposition, in a perpetual test of strength with each other. The desert meanders the settlement; it grows and engulfs the ploughs from the outside. Likewise, the desert is re-encoded and regained for the peasant. And this laying side by side, inside-outside related, means the two are doomed to always *externally* skirt and outgrow each other; the one starts at the limits of the other. Thus that the text will reveal instances of spaces that are governed by the regimes of either the smooth or the striated: the Badiya (for the Bedouins – smooth), the Hadara (where the citizenship and the law is located – striated), the logos and the nomos...

The politics of space that we see developed in *A Thousand Plateaus* have no parallel in *The Smooth and the Striated*, where I see them turning into poetics of space; the kind of fruitless aestheticization I spoke of in my introduction, a romanticised vision of struggle of little use. As this regime of opposing inside and outside, of inclusion and exclusion consolidates, any retrieval of self-organisation agency for the social body, any attempt to seize power, is always confronted with two restrictions: either having to do it from a *déterrement* and as if attacking a fortress, from the *outside* it is condemned to inhabit as an outcast, or with no sense of outside at all, as the compliant beholder of that image of all-encompassing

25. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979, pp. 294-321.

26. I am using Lyotard's verbiage on this subject of "framing" as in his *Discourse, Figure*, Minnesota University Press, Minneapolis, 2011.

totality and interiority that Capitalism wants us to condone. This finally consummates the type of dystopia the film *Blade Runner* (1982, Ridley Scott) perhaps predicts: hordes of reactionary militias, distressed characters with an anxious sense of alienation, relentlessly inhabiting a world that consists of pure exteriority.

Or otherwise, in Sven Lütticken's depiction: "The multinationals are, after all, the true nomads: in the past decade, it seems that only capital has lived up to Deleuze and Guattari's romantic theory – always on the move, not subject to any definitive 'reterritorialization'".<sup>27</sup>

### **From blob to block: The *becoming nomad* of this Century**

It is hard to pin down Foucault's mood when predicting this Century to eventually become Deleuzian.<sup>28</sup> Was he being ironic, or was he truly foreseeing a time when Deleuze's stances on subjectivity, on affects and representation would shape the relationship between the (in)dividual and the multitude? Stated only two years after the May '68 upheavals, it was perhaps that Foucault had these events in mind when praising Deleuze's *Logic of Sense* and *Difference and Repetition* for having unfettered that relationship from any so centring principle of sufficient reason: "As Deleuze has said to me [...] abandon the circle, a faulty principle of return; abandon our tendency to organize everything into a sphere". For Foucault, it was Deleuze who had grasped and brought plausibility into the difficult task these demands had encountered on their path to realization. So, how could one not presume Foucault to have made a connection between that realization and Deleuze's overthrowing of (respectively) Platonic and Hegelian views on representation, causality, dialectics and becoming.

I think that evaluation on the positive outcomes of subjectivity, in its political capacities for emancipation, has proven wrong; if there is a system that micropolitics of subjectivity and desire has served well, it is that of Global Capitalism. There is one particular thesis in Paolo Virno's essay *Dreamers of a Successful Life* that I subscribe to, and which argues that the May '68 ideals, precisely those concerning a political economy based on subjectivity, counteracting functionalism and endorsing the affective values of life, have found in Global Capitalism their best recipient.<sup>29</sup> It seems as though it was

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27. S. Lütticken, "Parklife", in *New Left Review*, 2001, 10, pp. 111-118.

28. M. Foucault, "Theatrum Philosophicum", in *Critique*, 282, 1970, pp. 885-908.

29. P. Virno, "Dreamers of a Successful Life", in *Autonomia: Post-Political Politics*, Semiotext(e), New York, 2007, pp. 112 on.

Margaret Thatcher (and, unfortunately, not Deleuze) who, with her model of Popular Capitalism, had made the best of State deregulation-meets-desire.<sup>30</sup> After all, *Capitalism made popular* – i.e. for everyone – also holds the promise of emancipation and of freedom’s entailment to subjectivity. Under these premises, a commitment to freedom implied a re-allotment of previous emancipatory narratives to the individual as the transfer and outlet of that subjectivity. The promise of turning the *masses* into a community of owners and of turning the common into a sum of individuals, entails a promotion of the individual. This means keeping up the fantasy that private property is a non-alienable right. So it is that the question of freedom transforms into a question of becoming individual, private and self-promoted. Finally, it becomes a question not only of the *right* to own private property. It is rather the *chance* to get a hand on it that has to be ensured. With *being* attached to *having* and with freedom attached to property, neoliberal societies see themselves relentlessly bound to instigate a desire to own and to create situations that allow for common assets to be turned into private property, or more accurately, to be turned into a commodity: into anything common *made* private and into anything fetishized. And that is exactly what happened to common space.

The private (and, for that matter, the formerly *common*) does not exist just as an abstract dimension; it finds its reification as a *sphere* and, as such, behaves like a spatial dimension. It is the common as space, as a social inter-relational dimension that is being outsourced and transformed into private. This is how I suggest the question of bio-politics, the government of life and the care of the self (*le souci de soi* in Foucault) to be reframed as a question of space and of space becoming a political dimension. In neoliberal societies, where private property constitutes the axis articulating a relation between politics and economics as well as the *sine qua non* condition of their continuity, it is space, or the urban landscape we inhabit, that must take on the task of activating dispositives of restriction of the common (bio-political, legal or otherwise). This happens especially when, by this logic, the common is presented as a downright hindrance to the non-alienability of this regime of privatization and commoditization.

An aligning genealogy for architecture emerges from here, one that goes back to the Enlightenment and to Marc-Antoine Laugier’s stance on an architectural grounding of civilization, at the impossible limits where the primitive hut mirrors itself as the primitive tent. The mystification of cloth and wrapping structures, forceful nomadic and

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30. See Thatcher’s speech on “Popular Capitalism” at the Margaret Thatcher Foundation: 1986 Oct 10 Fr., *Margaret Thatcher speech to Conservative Party Conference*, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106498> (Last retrieved, Dec. 2016).

impermanent ways of life, even self-metabolizing buildings<sup>31</sup> emerge side by side with measurements and architectural norms of a relentless bio-political spatial expropriation. And the correlation of these two features that are also present within the structure of commodity (aesthetic sublime reification, on the one hand; ideologically driven selective restriction, on the other), have become ubiquitous, if not almost synonymous of contemporary urban development.

It is now that we can return to the New York City of those early years of Frank Lloyd Wright's curved building, as it bore witness to a parallel growing dynamic of the real estate business; real estate playing the role of a restricting arbiter, fabulous architecture giving the people something to enthuse about. All the while and setting precedents for a model to follow, academic journals such as the *American Journal of Sociology*, with its 1950 issue on world urbanism, were not only advocating but also calling for privatized building commissions to take care of the problem of a growing population.<sup>32</sup>

We shall now ponder whether Frank Lloyd Wright, or even the architectural critic and fervent follower Aline Saarinen, were no less functional parts in this process of de-cluttering and privatizing Manhattan than the real estate mogul behind it, the so-called planning dictator Robert Moses himself. With projects such as the construction of the Triborough Bridge and the Brooklyn-Battery link (1936) and the clearing up, apportioning and subsequent privatization of New York City, Robert Moses seems to have been a prophet of what Steve Graham and Simon Marvin call *splintering urbanism: cellular clusters of globally connected and segregated high-service enclaves and network ghettos*, replacing the city itself as an organizing and convergent organism.<sup>33</sup>

Beyond what architects can decide, privatization advances to the pulse of the blob gaining momentum. Increasingly, real estate, urban planning and architecture are activating themselves as bio-political devices. Once a private building has been placed inside public space, it is not only that a portion of that commonality has been lost to the private sphere; it is also that a new set of random rules has to be tolerated. With a strong panoptic monitoring of the activities of the citizens in those areas, along with a stark restriction of their movements, power is no longer located in one visual place, it is everywhere and nowhere.

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31. As I have learnt recently from an office of urban architects in Germany that manufactures low-cost living quarters which conveniently made ecological, eventually disintegrate and self-digest.

32. D. J. Bogue, "World Urbanism", in *American Journal of Sociology*, 60, 5, 1955, pp. 471-486.

33. S. Graham, *Splintering Urbanism: Networked Infrastructures, Technological Mobilities and the Urban Condition*, Routledge, New York & London, 2001.

In meandering fluid architecture, the engulfing surfaces, spilling, crawling over the ground, also subvert delineation; the very relation between inside and outside, private and public. Overtly disavowing the dialectics of depth, shallowness, fullness, opacity and void, it is within the realm of these oppositions that a clarity regarding the limits of the building is also staged: where does the building begin, where does it end, where does the space of the non-building interlock, limit and set off? As the building does not take a clear stance on this, it can, for instance be a challenge for pedestrians to locate sidewalks and relate to space as included or excluded. This shall not be taken as a merely aesthetic critique alone: I see nothing to object in that, one day, the very idea of sidewalks could become obsolete. However, most of these buildings have taken advantage of the aesthetic issue of accommodating and helping showcase the indisputable beauty of curves contradicting straight lines, by broadening the now privatized areas where they stand. As space in its public/private tenancy willingly eschews readability, proper straightforward fencing reveals a challenge for architects; not only a real tectonic problem but also a matter of the political correctness of beauty.<sup>34</sup> If visualizing demarcation implies a sort of definition that is urgently to be avoided by *non-dialectical* architecture, fortresses and repealing-manoeuvers for undesired visitors have to be drawn otherwise. These are elegantly designed structures concealing their actual defensive purposes: poetic and incorporeal narrow water moats (shrewdly recasting the hardness of concrete walls just as an intangible reflection), hedges, gigantic sculptures by renowned artists, preferably with mirroring surfaces to reflect the architecture in its ghostly resemblance, CCTV cameras tracking the movements of passers-by, spikes coming from the ground preventing people from using the street for anything other than walking along it.

In the heyday of the Riots of London 2011, a famous architect praised curved architecture and open urban design for its advantage in deceiving the construction of barricades. Now that flanking walls and alleyways have disappeared, the crowd moves protests into the city roundabouts and stops the flow of traffic. As these spectacular buildings populate our cities, our relation with space is at risk of becoming a matter of aesthetics, dissolving our relation with politics in its lack of any contesting verbal consistency or articulation. And here, we should take Walter Benjamin's words very seriously: "All efforts to render politics aesthetics culminate in one thing: war".<sup>35</sup>

34. I had the chance to learn more about this issue through a round table discussion at the Bund Deutscher Architekten in Düsseldorf in November 2016.

35. W. Benjamin, Epilogue to "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", in *Illuminations. Essays and Reflections*, Schocken Books, New York, 1968, p. 241.